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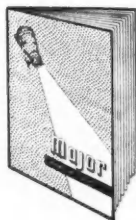
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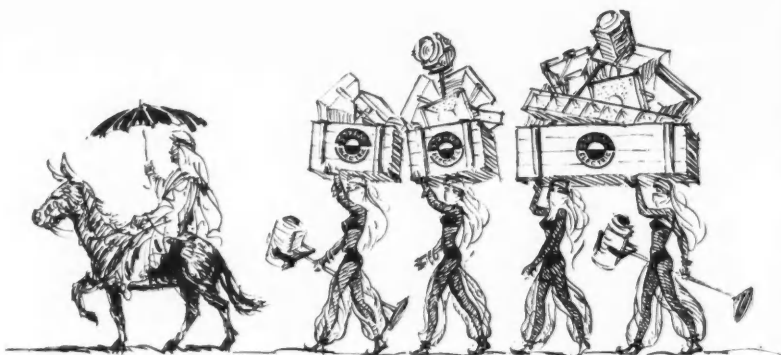
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# DRAMA

## *The Quarterly Theatre Review*

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NEW SERIES

SPRING 1957

NUMBER 44

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**A BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE PUBLICATION**

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## EDITORIAL

THE theatre has been passing through a period of crisis. In the last few years ninety theatres in Britain have closed their doors and many districts, some of them thickly populated, have no living theatre any more. The repertory movement, on which the quality of British acting depends, is in many places hard hit and everywhere it is under stress. Before the last two Budgets strong representations were made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for tax remission and there seemed reason to hope that relief would be granted before long.

Now the picture looks even gloomier; a harder struggle lies ahead. Transport difficulties may reduce audiences; higher costs may further cripple those striving to promote productions; but the probability is that, as so often before in time of stress, the need for the particular experience which only the living theatre can give will be felt more strongly than ever. This, at least, is the belief of the British Drama League.

It has chosen this critical moment to revise the basis of its membership and to bring to the fore the aims which its Founder laid down thirty-eight years ago. A member of the League, paying again the original subscription of one guinea, pledges himself "to assist the development of the art of the theatre and to promote a right relationship between drama and the life of the community." As in the beginning, membership is a token of support for the living theatre. Members can, if they wish, pay in addition a subscription to the League's Library, which comprises perhaps the largest collection of theatrical books and plays in the British Isles.

The League as a national body can do a very great deal to help the theatre on a national scale; it can also back up local effort. The last few months have produced some shining examples of dogged and skilful work by those who are determined to keep theatres open in their cities. The rebuilding of the Derby Playhouse after fire was made possible by the combined efforts of the public and of industry. Leicester, which at one time seemed likely to have no building in which it could house its non-profit repertory company, came at last to the point where a choice of a theatre or an opera house was offered.

The League's help may seem in such cases to be limited to encouragement and applause as it has no fund from which it can offer financial help. What it does provide is a channel through which all the interests concerned with the preservation of the theatre can act together; for it is through the local organisations which co-operate with the League and share its ideals that amateurs and professionals can work for the good of the whole theatre.

The creative experience of amateur production, too, is a major factor in our culture, and the community is benefited by this enrichment of many thousands of lives. If all those who hold these things to be a vital part of our culture will join together to make the League the force it could be, they will provide for the living theatre a centre of action and of unity.

# PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

By J. W. LAMBERT

IN international commerce, it seems, Britain, for all her errors of judgment, retains her position as the greatest clearing house in the world. A similar claim may hopefully be made for the London theatre. 1956 closed in a steady glow, if not precisely a blaze, of continuous interest; but very little of this sprang directly from our own native genius.

After the stimulus of the Berliner Ensemble came the exuberant charm of the Jean-Louis Barrault-Madeleine Renaud company. M. Barrault brought with him to the Palace Theatre an adaptation by Georges Neveux from Lope de Vega, *The Gardener's Dog*, and Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, neither of which offered much more than a display of highly mannered and excessively calculated grace. M. Barrault himself, still busy acting all over, indulged to a terrifying extent in grimaces of the sort which as Alceste he very properly deplored. In a short programme of verse-speaking (given by the whole company, sitting on the stage in dinner-jackets and dazzling silvery dresses) he surpassed himself in speaking Baudelaire's *Invitation au Voyage*. Coming to the lines "*Les plus rares fleurs Mêlant leurs odeurs*," he paused before the word *odeurs* and gave an enormous sniff, which clamped his nostrils together as though gripped by pincers; and this lamentable ingenuity, I fear, all too well resumes his method. Madame Renaud, on the other hand, achieves a constant *legato*, unfolding her arms in infinite gestures, rolling them out to her fingertips as though they were lengths of precious cloth—beautiful, once or twice; wearisome a hundred times repeated. Never wearisome however her superb management of her voice; and miraculous her transformation into the pert, gay, exuberant

heroine of the season's greatest popular success—Feydeau's *Occupe-toi d'Amélie*. In this sort of confection we must cast chauvinism aside and give the French best.

But Giraudoux's *Intermezzo* was just as well done at the Arts a year or two ago; we are beginning to understand the blend of sentiment, farce, satire, fantasy and melodrama. As for the greater glory, Claudel's *Christophe Colomb*, M. Barrault went all out in his search for "total theatre". What with a double chorus, a narrator, three levels of stage, a real dove and a cinema screen, everything possible was done to mitigate the tedium of the inflated and repetitious text; M. Barrault even succeeded in coaxing one or two brief moments of dramatic tension out of what seemed a very long evening.

I cannot conceal the fact that I do not care for this work, yet I would give a great deal if we had a dramatist ready even to attempt such a grandiose conception; and, more to the point still, an established repertory company capable of doing justice to it. M. Barrault and his players deserve close appraisal, but they also deserve our homage.

New gods, however, must be served; and our only approach to theatrical enterprise, George Devine's English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, has duly made obeisance at the altar of Brecht. With some advice from East Berlin they did *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, which presents that well-worn lady, the prostitute with a heart of gold, to illustrate the demonstrably false moral that

You can only help one of your luckless  
brothers  
By trampling on a dozen others.

Peggy Ashcroft played the good woman with a gentle simper which would have been more at home in *Quality Street*;



"CHRISTOPHE COLOMB" by Paul Claudel, produced at the Palace Theatre, London, by Jean-Louis Barrault. Settings by Max Ingrand.

but, impersonating her own brother in trousers, trilby and mask, she developed a rousing line of cruelly comic mischief. Exiguous crowds came and went in some admirably economical, bamboo-framed décors by Theo Otto, but somehow the scene came really alive only when Peter Wyngarde, as yet another

angry young man, snarled unscrupulously across the stage. A sense of sermonising was too seldom absent; the Brechtian mechanics of little notices popping up, of twangling instruments and other self-conscious novelties almost drowned the dramatist's unquestionable power and variety.

Back to France and a very different sort of *avant-garde*, with Eugène Ionesco's two short plays, *The Bald Prima Donna* and *The New Tenant*, at the Arts. How exhilarating the satirical nonsense of these two relentless exposés of human nature! In *The Bald Prima Donna* an English suburban couple exchange what passes for conversation; two visiting friends dimly recognise each other as husband and wife; the outside world, in the ludicrous shape of the captain of a fire brigade, erupts with a torrent of irrelevant nonsense; and the quiet desperation of *la vie quotidienne* is shattered with enchanting farcical verve. In *The New Tenant* a slip-slop cigarette-smoking charwoman, a sprucely-dressed man of conventional appearance but deep-surging obsession, and a couple of removal men invade an empty room, cram it to overflowing with the junk of a lifetime, obliterate the tenant—lost, as we are most of us lost, in slavery to familiar material possessions. The company came gallantly to grips with this sardonic farce; and what pleasure at last to have seen Robert Eddison in parts which really exercise his gift of hypnotic fantasy! Only in one respect did Peter Wood's highly intelligent productions fall short; he did not remember that the English language moves more slowly than the French, and that pace must not therefore be merely increased but subtly varied to produce a parallel brilliance.

Imports from America this quarter were headed by Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* at the Comedy Theatre. A drama of low-life in New York, it takes one of Mr. Miller's favourite themes—immigrant mentality—and unfortunately makes it, banned or not, no more than the pretext for a drama of sexual jealousy, too banal in conception and writing to rise above the commonplace. Some excellent supporting acting could not disguise two outstanding failures: I hardly thought it possible that Michael Gwynne could give so clumsy a performance as the lawyer-narrator drew from him; and as

the louring, dumb-ox Eddie, whose unrecognised desire for his niece brings disaster upon everybody, Anthony Quayle was unable to work up more than a short-winded character performance.

*The Diary of Anne Frank* proved not to be the tear-jerker one had feared; the picture of a Jewish family immured in an Amsterdam attic during the German occupation was done with few concessions to cheap sentiment. But it lost by being presented through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old girl; the linking passages of extracts from her diary were an evasion, not a solution, of dramatic problems; and Perlita Neilson, though technically excellent, gave a monotonously strident performance—preferable, no doubt, to infantile sweetness, but throwing away a good deal. Also transatlantic, *Mrs. Gibbons' Boys* at the Westminster made an interesting contrast to, say, *Sailor Beware*; even a domestic farce, expertly machined, may have some immediate relevance to life; an English cast, and especially Avice Landone as a credulous and gently ferocious Mom, more successfully got into the skin of innate Americanism than is usual.

Of our English plays I should have liked to praise Leo Lehman's *Who Cares?* at the Fortune Theatre. Mr. Lehman wishes to say that we here do not understand, cannot feel, the mentality and anguish of those who live and suffer in the confused and tyrannical régimes of Central Europe. He is right, but he has spoilt his case by making his representative Englishman a fuddy-duddy professor, and by writing his play for the most part with crude and insensitive banality. Alec Clunes bumbled expertly as the professor; Denholm Elliott twitched with familiar skill as a prickly young refugee.

In the world of light comedy Noel Coward's *Nude with Violin* at the Globe has an amusing idea which is spoiled by paucity of wit. It is rescued by a familiar, gay little cockney turn by Kathleen Harrison, and a more original irruption by Patience Collier as an



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"PLAINTIFF IN A PRETTY HAT" at St. Martin's Theatre. Eynon Evans, Andree Melly and Hugh Williams. Photograph by Houston Rogers.

incandescent Russian; and of course by John Gielgud, a master of suave comedy, repellently attractive as one of the stage's many and splendid scheming valets. Far better done, to be frank, is *Plaintiff in a Pretty Hat*, by Hugh and Margaret Williams. In an aristocratic if penurious setting a father rescues his son from an amorous predicament. Funny and quite often witty, the play is given what this sort of entertainment rarely has, perfect casting, with Mr. Williams himself leading the revels, and Jack Minster's production keeping an eye on nice points.

A pair of domestic thrillers pointed

up one interesting difference between otherwise undistinguished examples of this genre. *Double Image* at the Savoy, in which Richard Attenborough ably dealt with one of those "which twin" problems, is so flatly written that I found it difficult to sit it through; *A Touch of Fear* at the Aldwych by that competent partnership, Dorothy and Campbell Christie, disappointing after *His Excellency* and *Carrington, V.C.*, remains intelligent of its kind, with relatively high quality home-counties dialogue.

\* \* \*

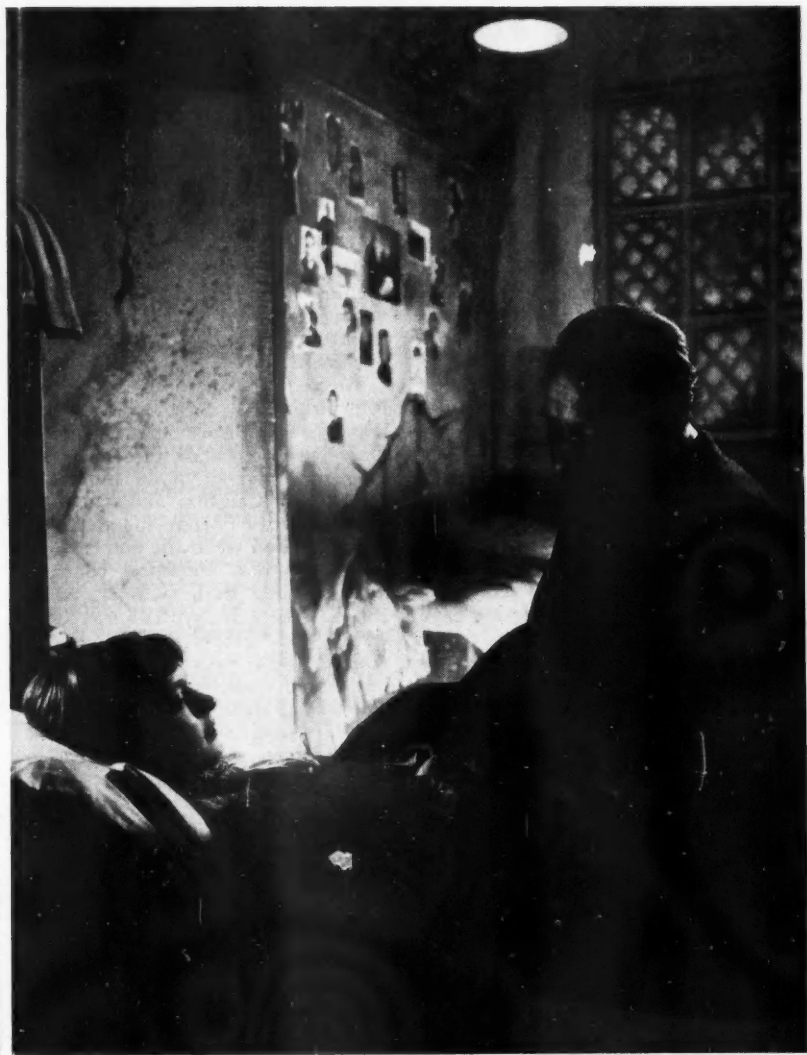
Among the revivals Shakespeare has

been represented only at the Old Vic, which made a slight recovery from the appalling start of its present season. In *Much Ado about Nothing* Keith Michell, breezy, and Barbara Jefford, ferocious, battled gallantly against the too recent ghosts of Sir John and Dame Peggy. With *The Merchant of Venice* a marked improvement gave cause for mild rejoicing. In rich and melting sets by Loudon Sainthill the company achieved a touch of maturity; Miss Jefford's Portia verged upon, but just avoided, the galumphing; Robert Helpmann gave Shylock a bitter, crouching dignity—admirably conceived but marred in execution by the limitations of his light tenor voice.

Belated centenary tributes to Shaw came from Theatre Workshop, for whom Avis Bunnage drew a full-blooded Lady Cicely Waynflete in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, and from a production of *The Devil's Disciple* at the Winter Garden in which Tyrone Power had all too little difficulty in dominating, as Dick Dudgeon, a curiously out-at-elbows company.

But the real interest of last year's revivals lay in two examples of what is generally called Restoration comedy: John Clements' production of *The Way of the World*, George Devine's of *The Country Wife*. Mr. Clements, at the Saville Theatre, gave the highly-polished Congreve a conventionally mannered performance which had one immense merit—it put back at the centre of the play—too long regarded as a showcase for the flashing Milla-mant (Kay Hammond, charming, gurgling and rather slow)—the old, silly, pitiful, grotesque, vain and deplorable Lady Wishfort. And Margaret Rutherford, in her second bite at the part, made her all these things. Playing less obviously for farce or for pathos than before, she made the old harpy a most dramatic figure, ridiculous in her vanity, shameful in her moments of all-too-lucid self-knowledge, quite frightening in her anger. This is one of the definitive performances of our time.

It rather broke the bounds of Mr. Clements' method—which offers the piece as an "artificial comedy"; a category devised for this sort of play by the squeamish Charles Lamb, and its bane ever since. How stupid and how restricting it is was magnificently demonstrated by *The Country Wife*, done not as a dance of amoral puppets but as what it really is, a rather primitive but unmistakably realistic satirical comedy. (If this shows the influence of Brecht, thank heaven for it.) Mr. Devine abandoned claustrophobic picture sets and used instead a handful of necessary screens, chairs, tables. This made *The Country Wife* as exhilaratingly fast as *The Way of the World*, with its elaborately built scenery, was haltingly slow. He then dispensed with all the usual mopping and mowing, kneemaking and wrist-twirling, except what was actually required to point up the lines. He could not cure Laurence Harvey, as the scheming amorist Horner, of an addiction to archness. But he found two ideal performances. John Moffat has for years been catching the eye here and there—in *Eurydice*, in *The Winter's Tale*, in *The Square Ring*: never yet have his gifts been so admirably exercised as in drawing the inane, tedious, smug yet generous-hearted Sparkish. His command of pace and flourish, the self-satisfied tilt of his jaw, the bright uneasiness of his questing eye, the anxious defiance hooting in his voice, built up a wonderful gull. And he was matched by Joan Plowright as the country wife. Miss Plowright too has been catching the eye, since the beginning of the English Stage Company's work. She emerges as the only young player I can think of potentially capable of holding a candle to the astonishing Angelika Hurwicz of the Berliner Ensemble. Her Margery Pinchwife is an endearing creation; not a little innocent in the great city, but a little ignoramus only too anxious to learn. Chubby, snub, bright-eyed, bubbling with glee, deliciously sulky; reporting with unabashed astonishment



"THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK" at the Phoenix Theatre. Perlita Neilson as Anne and George Voskovec as her father. Photograph by Angus McBean.

the fascinating complexities of a sophisticated kiss, refuting with noble and ill-timed indignation the shocking suggestion that dear Mr. Horner is not the

man he should be, Miss Plowright confers upon our shabby world a benison of gaiety which we must receive with gratitude and admiration.

# NEW YORK IMPRESSIONS

By E. MARTIN BROWNE

FOUR months, my longest stay in New York City, have served to make me aware of how little I know about the American theatre, and to make me want to know more. It is easy for the visitor to confine his attention to the city itself and hardly to realise, even so, the infinite varieties of life among its eight million people. It is impossible to work with a body of students as I have been doing these last few months, however, without being brought up against not only the city's complexity but also that of the continent to which it is the gateway.

Broadway holds a strange position in a theatre on which it has far less influence than Shaftesbury Avenue has on the theatre of Britain. The seats at a Broadway house are very hard to get, and very expensive if the show is a success. Many of the theatregoers have their ways of seeing shows: there are usually several previews; there are theatregoers' clubs. Seats for a successful production are mostly bought on expense accounts: to see the "hits" is the aim of every out-of-town executive and his New York hosts will pay fabulous sums to satisfy him.

For the Broadway theatre is a prestige theatre. Here you will not find the solid core of people who regard the theatre as an essential part of life. This does not mean that such people do not exist, or that Broadway has no interest for them. Broadway is still the highest testing ground for a play, an actor, a designer or a director. A continent of many races is focussed here: if the test is passed, the goods are worth buying everywhere, and the play in particular will be performed thousands of times and thousands of miles from New York.

But, as my students quickly showed me, the traffic runs two ways. Broadway itself is staffed largely by people who have got their training and ex-

perience outside New York, and got it by supplying theatre to communities which have no other drama than that provided by the colleges and the amateur "community theatres". The largest of these latter is at Tulsa, Oklahoma; here for thirty years a programme of fine quality has been maintained by men trained in college theatres. The present director is Ted Viehman, formerly on the faculty of Carnegie Institute of Technology at Pittsburgh. My best student stage-manager came from Seattle, where the University runs four theatres, one of them a show-boat. One student was from North Carolina and had worked with the Barter Theatre, founded during the depression when the audience paid in kind so that the actors could eat; another came from Georgia, another was at school in Wittenburg (Ohio). Along with others from Minnesota, Kansas, Iowa, came one with the unmistakable quality of Harvard; and added to all these were some from overseas—Holland, Singapore, Rhodesia.

A continent and a world is here: and on Broadway you find that the majority of actors and technicians have arrived from such diverse backgrounds as these, and that most of them have learned their craft in college. They have brought with them a knowledge of the taste of their own communities which, if used wisely, can tell a Broadway producer what his public wants: for the public of Broadway, as we have seen, comes from many other places besides New York, and it is a startling fact that despite its smallness, in comparison with the overwhelming size of the other entertainment industries, the living theatre still has the strongest hold on the American imagination.

Yet, even here, in the country whose eyes are on the future, the theatre seems to hold up its mirror to life in a

backward direction. Very seldom does a play reflect the movement of thought as it is happening; not often, indeed, does it reflect any movement of thought at all. The development of awareness of the world, and of her responsibility in it, which is so clear when one talks to Americans, is hardly to be noticed in the theatre. Or can the reception of *The Diary of Anne Frank* be related to it?

This play, a year old but still as fresh as when it opened, was the first show I saw, and one I shall never forget. The script had been made with infinite care and skill by the Hacketts (husband and wife), who gave up regular jobs with M.G.M. to prepare it. The production was made by Garson Kanin, after visiting Amsterdam and meeting Mr. Frank, with a sense of dedication which all the actors shared and maintained. The effect of this translation of an intimate human document into terms of theatre was exalting: here was the courage and unquenchable life of ordinary people transfiguring sordidness and horror. When the play opened simultaneously in several German cities and struck its audiences dumb with shame, the news was the chief topic of conversation in New York for days.

In the last few years, Broadway has been given an infusion of new life by "off-Broadway". A number of little theatres, greater than London had in the thirties, has established a clientele of theatre fans, who are content to sit, often in great discomfort, for the sake of seeing what often are fine things never likely to reach the commercial stage. The seats are cheaper and the actors' pay much lower; the worst consequence is that the management has to release them for TV engagements which pay their bills, and the cast is liable to change with undue rapidity. One of the most interesting productions has been *The Threepenny Opera*, given by Carmen Capalbo with the right kind of savage gaiety, but suffering by now from this fluctuation in cast.

Another novelty of the last few years

is the "concert" reading. The all-star *Don Juan in Hell* brought this to fame some years ago, and many such concert readings have been attempted since. I was lucky enough to see one of the best, a dramatisation of the second volume of Sean O'Casey's autobiography *Pictures in the Hallway*. It was directed very simply but with great taste, the six readers sitting on high stools, only making such movement as the rhythm of their lines absolutely called for, and lit by individual spots with a subtly changing unobtrusive background. This proved to be the ideal treatment of O'Casey's writing. His highly decorated poetic prose has sometimes seemed, in the later plays, to be too elaborate for the stage: here, with all the attention concentrated on the words alone, we were able to enjoy the feast he spread before us.

Other memories are much less vivid. Some admirable acting, direction and design wasted on a worthless play, *Middle of the Night*; a disaster of the most sententious kind adapted from Alan Paton's, *Too Late the Phalarope*; the loss of all Thornton Wilder's distinctive quality from *The Matchmaker* diminishing it into broad farce.

Is there significance in the success of *Separate Tables* set against the failure of the same author's *The Sleeping Prince*? Only, I think, in terms of performance. Nobody takes either of the Rattigan plays very seriously; but the one stood up to the test of performance, the other did not. *The Reluctant Debutante* is accepted on the same terms; American audiences are prepared to be as escapist as English ones if the play is a good medium for acting.

Is there significance, then, in the huge success of Eugene O'Neill's posthumous play *Long Day's Journey into Night*? Only on the same terms. Here is writing by a master hand, performed so that its quality is brought out; and that, even though the curtain rises an hour earlier than the regular Broadway time, is enough to bring people in. O'Neill is coming back into favour;

*The Iceman Cometh* has had a long run off-Broadway, and the enterprising young management of Capalbo and Chase, which starts its operations in a small Broadway theatre with Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson on Graham Greene's new play *The Potting Shed*, is to put on *A Moon for the Misbegotten* as its next offering.

*Long Day's Journey* is a play of despair. Has this fact anything to do with its reception? In a country where the outward appearance of things is so triumphantly successful, it seems strange that this could be so: and yet it may be. When success is the criterion, despair lurks round the corner; and a taste of the fear of despair may be the necessary spur to success. There is, too, in American psychology at present a desire,

even stronger than can be seen in England, to strip things bare, and a hankering for the primitively savage. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, in a production which had suffered from neglect but was still impressive, affected one more by its savagery than by its humanity—for the humanity in it is almost all so impoverished in spirit.

It is a relief to turn from Broadway where the barometer flickers from fair to stormy and look at the programmes of theatres far to the west: Mozart Operas, Shakespeare, Shaw (though he has two good revivals on Broadway at present), and the richest fare of the theatre throughout the ages. But the traffic may yet move into Broadway in taste and quality as well as in "know-how". I hope so.

## THE VICTORIAN THEATRE

By J. C. TREWIN

TWO or three weeks before writing this, I saw a revival of Tom Taylor's melodrama, *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*, at the Arts Theatre Club in London. Clearly, some in that night's audience had come prepared to laugh their heads off. Walter Hudd, the director, had ordained, wisely, that the cast should play "straight". Thus, for half the night, the battle swayed: the audience laughed when it could, but it was obvious, by the second interval, that Taylor was winning. Hawkshaw, the detective, performed his protean work without more than an intermittent giggle from a house by now united. It was, in fact, what always happens when a play of sound, honest craftsmanship is acted soundly and honestly.

The Victorian theatre has suffered in the public mind because of an oak-rooted belief that it consisted of a gaggle of wild, whiskered Stentors braying away before an audience composed of (at a venture) Matthew Arnold, Mr.

Verdant Green, Clement Scott, the Pooters, and Mr. Burwin-Fosselton. The easiest, and silliest, of theatrical tricks is to guy the old plays. Some scenes in even the most vulnerable of them can hold the house in astonished silence. Now if the work of our Angry Young Men (tiresome phrase) could endure as long as the marrowy melodramas of Boucicault, or the plays of Taylor and Reade, it would be amusing to know how audiences, well into the twenty-first century, might receive them. With adorations, fertile tears, with groans that thunder love, with sighs of fire? I doubt it.

True, on the Victorian stage there were broad acres of plush and fustian, just as in our own day there is a delight in tramping along the messier cinder-paths. But, strangely, few playgoers trouble to go back, in imagination, to explore for themselves—as, say, the Nesbit children would enter another period under the arching Amulet. Hearsay seems to be enough.



What does "Victorian" mean to the casual playgoer? He will probably speak of *Caste* and the teacup-and-saucer drama, as useful a signpost as 1066 or 1588. He will say "Irving, Ellen Terry" in what I hold to be a proper tone of reverence, or (if he is still brash) much as a dirt-track rider might speak of a hansom-cab. Doubtless he will know—for it is a good story—of Mrs. Patrick Campbell's entrance at the St. James's *première* of *The Second Mrs. Tanageray*, and he has probably debated the legend of Oscar Wilde (not, *The Importance of Being Earnest* apart, a valuable writer). The rest is—well, good easy fun. *The Silver King* perhaps. And, inevitably, *East Lynne*, and—what a riot!—*Maria Marten*.

There are, of course, specialists. Mr. George Rowell, author of *The Victorian Theatre*\* writes as one. It is an awkward word. A specialist can be so swathed and muffled in his subject that he cannot possibly disengage himself from the folds to display it to a stranger. The works of earnest theatre researchers, useful on the shelf, can be glum to read. So often these cave-dwellers, preoccupied with footnote and bibliography, asterisk and dagger, write only for other researchers. In an odd closed-circle world they fail to raise their eyes. They have no communicable excitement, no power to evoke. It is mere pedantry, tedious unless informed, aerated by a living affection for the living stage. If a writer lacks the love that can summon and transform, the reader's heart must ache and a drowsy numbness pain his sense.

Mercifully, Mr. Rowell is not just a cave-dweller, an unselective cairn-builder. He does not deal in sour grapes or kill the thing he loves, and he has a glint of humour. Such a book as his must go out, of course, with the note, "E. and O.E." It cannot be offered otherwise. I daresay there will be critics to complain of Mr. Rowell's choice of emphasis, the lighting and staging of his

monograph. I will not enlarge on my few differences with him, or note the minor errors and omissions I have picked up. If I find the book less kindling than his selection of *Nineteenth-Century Plays* for the World's Classics—*The Ticket-of-Leave Man* is there—that is because the play-texts are the living stuff of the period's Theatre Theatrical for us to re-stage in our minds. Everyone, at heart, is his own favourite producer—though Mr. Rowell warns us now that to recreate from the text a performance of a Victorian work "calls for imagination strongly disciplined in the theatrical production of the day."

This study, annexing the Edwardian world, ends at 1914. It was not until then, Mr. Rowell feels, that the Victorian stage was superseded. This allows us to call Tree a Victorian (and, after all, he was born in 1852). Mr. Hesketh Pearson's book about him\* is a most agreeable sketch. I gather, from some who knew Tree, that it is light-weight; but we are glad to have an approachable book that is not portentously over-documented.

My complaint about Mr. Rowell and Mr. Pearson is that neither generates the true quality of excitement. In the name of Thespis, let us cease to be frightened of the word. When I think of the Victorian stage I think of matters that excite me: the work of William Charles Macready, great and honourable player who must have been much better all-round than Edmund Kean (yes, I know of that *Othello*); Charles Kean's feeling for spectacle, his comic pedantries aside; the career of Samuel Phelps, rugged Shakespearean of the Wells; the Bancrofts and the Robertson comedies; the Savoy operas; the grand gas-lit tapestry of the Lyceum years; Gaiety burlesque; the sober craftsmanship of Victorian dramatists who knew how to make a play; the myriad excitements—in a phrase I must repeat—of the Theatre Theatrical. In the Victorian world the men of the stage

\**Beerbohm Tree: His Life and Laughter*. Methuen, 25s.

\*Oxford University Press, 25s.

were single-minded. The best of them had a high dignity: Irving's knighthood at last honoured Shakespeare's fellows nearly 300 years after Shakespeare's death.

I think, myself, that the first actor-knight should have been William Macready:

Thine is it that our drama did not die  
Nor flicker down to brainless pantomime  
And those gilt gauds men-children swarm  
to see.

An apostrophe indeed! Macready has been curiously disparaged. Peter Forster, in an urbane DRAMA article not long ago, claimed that the list of parts Macready acted outside Shakespeare was a "give-away". By no means. Surely it is clear that Macready sought to put on the best work he could get, the best rhetorical drama that the men of his time could offer? Did he not implore Browning to write a tragedy for him? It was not his fault that Browning, in the theatre (*Stratford, A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*) proved to be a bore. (I agree with Mr. Rowell who says that this poet's failure as a dramatist was less predictable than that of his forerunners: "He, of all the poets of his age, cast his ideas in the shape of characters.") Bulwer Lytton, ephemeral though he was (and amusingly snobbish) was an efficient craftsman who knew the methods of the French Romantic drama. I am not sure that, even to-day, a revival of *Richelieu* might not be interesting. Which of our actors, I wonder, would dominate the scene of the threatened Curse of Rome:

Then wakes the power which in the age  
of iron  
Burst forth to curb the great and raise  
the low.  
Mark where she stands! Around her form  
I draw  
The awful circle of our solemn Church!  
Set but a foot within that holy ground,  
And on thy head—yea, though it wore  
a crown—  
I launch the curse of Rome.

It ought not to be forgotten that Macready dared to put on at Drury Lane a play Mr. Rowell does not mention: Westland Marston's *The Patrician's Daughter*, a verse tragedy of the spiritual

conflicts of modern life: something Mr. Eliot would essay in our own time. It failed, but it was an experiment. Dickens wrote the prologue for it:

Awake the Present! Shall no scene display  
The tragic passions of the passing day?  
and again:

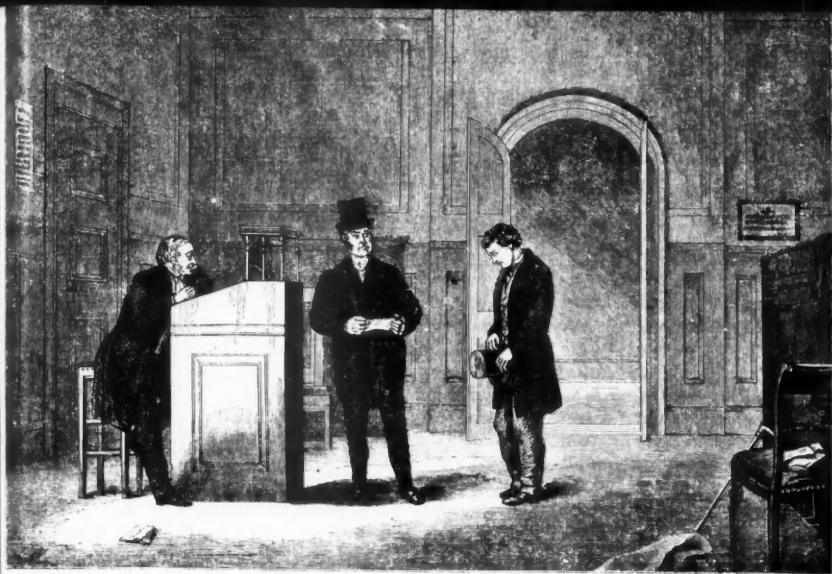
Not light its import, and not poor  
its mien;  
Yourselves the actors, and your homes  
the scene.

(By the way, what parts, outside Shakespeare, did John Philip Kemble and Edmund Kean contribute to the *lasting* repertory of the stage?)

In mid-Victorian years realistic drama was struggling from the dark. Literary figures condescended to the theatre rather than shared in its struggle. There is a period—one of much distinguished playing—that may seem as empty to a casual observer as the "coal sack" in the Milky Way to a naked eye. It deserves closer examination—and the explorer need not concentrate upon, say, Tennyson who was a superb poet without a sense of the stage (though he wrote one good play, *Harold*, which went unproduced for many years, and which Mr. Rowell omits).

Although the verse drama faltered off into minor doublet-work and amorphous closet-pieces, and although the prose drama was slow to find itself, the Victorian stage never lacked its splendour of performance. In such a book as Laurence Irving's portrait of his grandfather, *Henry Irving*—a miracle of evocative stage history—we can see, excitingly, the theatrical panorama across which a great man moved.

If we look back upon this world with a friendly eye, desiring neither to gush about the past (and be careful with the word "gush" which means praise of something we dislike), nor to show our skill in sour and peevish phrase-making, the Victorian stage, the honest, downright theatre of the professional, can flame and glow in a responsive mind. Tree said somewhere—Mr. Pearson quotes him—that "cynicism is the humour of hatred". We need not be



"THE TICKET-OF-LEAVE MAN" at the Olympic Theatre, 27th May 1863. From the Mander and Mitchenson Collection.

cynical. We need not be patronising in a spirit of "Don't let's be beastly to the Victorians". (And we should remember that there was a stage in the provinces as well as in the metropolis.) If we love the living theatre without striking attitudes about it, we can see the faults of the Victorian stage and yet continue to admire. Among other things we can admire it for a spirit of wonder, a delighted sense of make-believe, a steady pleasure in the theatre for the theatre's sake: something, I fear, we are losing. There is much (I agree) for laughter in the Victorian world, but it ought to be the laughter of affection, not of supercilious mockery.

Let us—in these ungenerous days—honour the Victorian stage. Let us remember, at random, the abolition of the patents, the long years of evolution in staging and acting and lighting (and in playgoing), the magnificent austerity of William Charles Macready, the tested oak of Phelps, the high comedy of the Bancrofts and Hare, Irving's potent imagination (we can be sure that his Cornish upbringing had its effect), the aureoled Ellen Terry, the

names of, say, Genevieve Ward, Forbes Robertson, Tree, J. L. Toole, Alexander, Wyndham, Benson, the spectacle and the sentiment, the *panache* of dramatists and managers, the strong passion and vigorous action, the flash-and-flare of pantomime and vaudeville, the bright partnership of the Savoy, burlesque and its monstrous punsters (a Channel crossing: "this sick transit spoils the glory o' Monday"), the tenoned-and-mortised drama of Jones and Pinero, the sudden east wind that was Shaw: much else down the burdened years:

Now the long glories prance and triumph  
by:  
And now the pomps have passed, and  
we depart  
Each to the peace or strife of his own  
heart:  
And now the day whose bosom was so high  
Sinks billowing down . . .

We began at the Arts Theatre. Sitting and remembering that night—while Taylor's play spoke, in its direct fervour, for the drama of more than ninety years ago—I could not find it in my heart to scorn the Victorian stage.

# THE PRESS AND THE THEATRE

By IVOR BROWN

THE number of people who believe that they get all the publicity they deserve is very few. There are always, it is true, a few news names whose owners are pestered with the attentions of the Press: they cannot bang a door without it being an Incident: they cannot smile at a friend of the opposite sex without it being a source of Rumour, and Rumour, as Shakespeare knew,

is a pipe

Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures, and much loved of the crowd, "the blunt monster with uncounted heads."

That "monster" must be served if the circulations counted by the million (or several millions) are to be kept up. If they are not maintained, then the advertising revenue, now seriously menaced by Commercial Television, declines, and without that revenue papers die. Hence, the managing editors of the newspapers are continually pressed to print what the "monster" is believed to crave. Unfortunately for the theatre, news, of which Rumour is an important element, is deemed to be more desired than views. In other words, dramatic criticism dwindles while theatre gossip and "stories of the Stars" increase. That is bad news for would-be critics, whose numbers are enormous.

There can be no doubt that dramatic criticism is a declining profession. There are far more reasons for this than editorial surrender to that chattering-smattery treatment of the drama which is supposed to be, and probably is, since news editors know their business: "what the public wants."

Fifty years ago the theatre stood easily first in the space given in the Press to entertainment, for the simple reason that it had almost a monopoly in its own field. Soon the silent cinema began to be written about seriously and

so the film critics arrived, serving a host of picture-goers much larger than the theatre public. Next came Radio. Then Talking Pictures. Then Television. Then two Television services. So the Critics' Circle, which began as a small organisation of dramatic and musical critics, was enlarged with a swarm of radio and television critics. Inevitably the space commanded by the theatre in the Press kept diminishing in order to make room for its rivals. Then came the war of 1939-45, during and after which paper shortage was acute and all features had to be cut down to the lowest possible limits.

There was a time when Clement Scott would fill a whole column of the *Daily Telegraph* with his notice of a London first night. There was a time when Bernard Shaw could write notices of one play in *The Saturday Review* running to three thousand words. (And not a word too many with that hand in full flow.) There was, much more recently, a time when the *Observer* gave a whole page every week to news and views of the theatre. Now, even the weekly reviews condense their dramatic criticism of several plays into a few hundred words, while in the most popular dailies the notice of even an important production will be limited to a snap judgment, expressed in a few sentences. Moreover, the more popular the paper the greater will be the stress on news; an accident or incident has much more appeal than has a "notice" for news-editors with the "monster" in mind.

The fact that paper, so long and so severely rationed, is now fully available, is not going to restore the old size of newspapers. We shall not soon see a twenty-four page *News Chronicle* or a thirty-six page *Observer* or *Sunday Times*. The raw material, paper known as "news-print", costs six times what it

did; printing costs and overheads have soared likewise. And the advertisements without which the newspaper itself would cost so much as to reduce all circulations to trifling figures, are increasingly threatened by the pressure of Commercial Television. Inevitably, during the coming year this will, with its newly-opened stations in the North and West, increase its hold upon the millions and on the salesmen soliciting the spending money of the millions.

With its many competitors for space and with that space only slightly increased in most cases, dramatic criticism will have to remain scarce and scrappy. It can be argued that, since most readers of daily and evening newspapers are either lazy or in a hurry or travelling in cramped conditions inimical to serious reading, the brevity of reviews means more readers for those brief reviews, especially if they are snappy as well as scrappy. This stimulates a pert kind of criticism which may be most unfair to play or players. The newspapers are themselves part of the industry of entertainment and editors, seeking a large appeal for their papers and probably knowing little and caring little about the theatre, like critics to be immediately and urgently readable. Hence the critic on approval naturally strives to be bright, and the temptation to put wit before justice is likely to beset him.

The drama may, on the whole, benefit from the millions of people who glance at such notices, or at least at the headline. The theatre is by this means kept in the news in a brash sort of way, but this state of affairs is frustrating to the informed and conscientious would-be critic and often infuriating to the management, dramatist, and players, who are told that this or that was all wrong without being told why it was wrong.

It is to be hoped that the public, deprived, except in a few instances, of criticism that is fully and properly argued, and confronted with a few terse, and often tart, sentences, will be

inclined to do more of its own criticism. Since, in the present economic condition of newspapers, most readers cannot expect ample criticism, they should use the Press more for information about what is going on than for instruction as to what is good.

Of course, everybody is a critic of something at all hours, be it domestic cooking or the antics of politicians or the management of British Railways. Everybody who goes to any entertainment or sits at home with the radio or TV set is, in some sort, his own critic. He knows whether he has been satisfied or not and may sometimes consult the papers to see whether the critics agree.

My own wish is that the public will be increasingly ready to make its own judgments: in the case of the theatre it must, first of all, go to the theatre in order to be critical afterwards. For this reason the activities of the British Drama League's groups of playgoers are particularly valuable: plays are visited and discussed, and the plays chosen are usually those likely to stimulate intelligent controversy. It would be admirable if these activities could be expanded to amateur as well as professional productions on a very wide scale. Since the newspapers are giving less criticism, let the public do the job for itself.

It may do some good if keen playgoers will badger editors for more and better critical features: but the editors with large circulations to consider are unlikely to take much notice of these supplications. In the case of the local press such pressure may be really effective. For the administrators of smaller papers are not only concerned with individual readers; they like to have prestige and if they can be persuaded that their critical features are carefully read and deemed important by a section of their readers, they will be prompted to maintain a decent standard in the work printed. They may even, under suasion, expand the critic's space, while seeing that the writer has knowledge of his subject and power to appreciate

the meritorious in the work presented, either by a professional company or an amateur group.

So there is real need of pressure by theatrical enthusiasts and results may be expected, at least on a small scale, if that pressure is kept up. At the same time it must always be remembered that the Press is by no means the only forum for expression of opinion about art and entertainment. The national and regional directors of the B.B.C. and the framers of TV programmes can be reminded of public interest in the theatre and programme-features suggested. Letters of appreciation after good theatrical discussions or performances will be helpful. I have already spoken of the good work of the British Drama League's playgoing groups. Members of those, and other interested persons, may discover that organising discussions, Brains Trusts and the like on dramatic topics will attract the con-

siderable number of people who enjoy these often lively entertainments. Such functions will have added value if they are reported in the local press, as they probably will be if the papers are kept informed and reporters made welcome. To ask the local editor to take the Chair should guarantee a report if the invitation is accepted.

To sum up: the possibility of getting the huge-circulation Press to grant more space and to take the theatre more seriously is a slender one. But we can work away in other channels. It is surely probable that such activities will help to publicise the League and to attract new members among those who either feel already, or can be brought to feel, that the theatre can be a happy addition and a genuine enrichment to their workaday lives. That is our faith and for it we must fight, seizing on every opportunity to press our claims and prove our case.

## SPONTANEOUS ACTING

By A. S. NEILL

**T**O-DAY spontaneous acting is an accepted part of education, but when we began it at Summerhill in 1921 we may have been pioneers in the subject. We had no ulterior aim; we did not try to make actors, to teach deportment or elocution, to give self-confidence in expression: we held the "spont" class because it was fun for the participants and the audience. The majority of the children never took part, but many who could not act were good in the art room or workshop. We had no written rules but the unwritten law was that the acting must be spontaneous; Bob and Mary were not allowed to put their heads together to make a scene. Each class had all ages, from seven to puberty and over, and the programme had to be varied and adapted so that all could share it.

I usually began with simple mimes

... hanging up a coat, plucking flowers, a blind man crossing a street, picking up a shilling on the street and finding it wasn't solid, waiting for someone who is very late, snatching a meal in a station restaurant when the train may be leaving at any moment. I found, to my disappointment, that children cannot invent situations easily, so that the "plot" was almost always mine. I insisted on giving a skeleton only: "You are a father, you a mother, you a son just expelled from school. Carry on." To give the skeleton even a little flesh spoils the whole picture, for the joy is the imaginative invention. I say: "You are burgling a safe and I, the owner, come into the room. Carry on." I get a dozen charming facets. One boy has come from the safe factory to inspect it; a girl claims to be the new secretary, "but perhaps I have got



into the wrong house." Another girl tries to vamp me. There is never any imitation of another when children are free from external discipline and fear, and this is clearly shown in our art room where every picture is original.

I find that children will not and cannot act a serious role. Give them a funeral and they will make it funny if possible. This is as it should be, for no one can act something outside his or her experience, just as no author can depict what he hasn't lived through in some way. A Scottish youth of seventeen once sent me a short story he had written. He had never been outside his native village. It began: "It was late in Piccadilly. The lamplighter was putting out the lights. It was ten o'clock." The solemn situation is not for children, neither is the love situation. No adolescent I have ever met could act a love scene. On the surface the reason would seem to be self-conscious embarrassment, but the deeper reason must be that the theme is too important to be taken seriously or made comic. Hence the teacher avoids love and death, although he can get good acting from the skeleton plot: "The vicar has laid his tall hat down at the brink of the grave while he prays. A high wind makes the hat rock. You are a mourner trying to control your face." This kind of situation is excellent for facial expression.

The teacher should be a bit of an actor himself, not because he should inspire his class but because he can engineer community acting. I say: "I am an immigration officer at Harwich. You are passengers coming off the boat." Here I admit that there is a little leading, for my questions are intended to provoke anger or evasion or what not. Quite often among the passengers are one or two who usually never act at all.

Telephone calls with the wrong numbers are popular and often witty. I have seen a girl and a boy bring the house down when she had telephoned the butcher and got the local doctor by

mistake. This suggests that I attach more importance to wit and humour than to straight acting. It may be so, but I think the criterion is sincerity first and foremost. Free children are wonderfully sincere and when a newcomer begins to overact they are too kind to criticise; they know that freedom will gradually cure the fault—it always does. They are rather pained when some child is an exhibitionist and insists on holding the centre of the stage. Our exhibitionists are always around the age of seven or eight—boys, not girls. I have a boy of eight who would have a shot at acting Hamlet.

Our most popular actors are those who possess the gift of what we might call memorised imagination; the gift of bringing in unexpected touches. The orator who has a cold and has forgotten his handkerchief will point dramatically to the roof and when all eyes are uplifted he will do a surreptitious wipe with his sleeve; the observant dentist will adjust the height of the chair with his foot; the football fan watching a clever pass will automatically move his right foot. "Take a cold bath in October" will quickly distinguish your ham actors from your natural ones. But one must not expect to have brilliant results at every session. Here is one piece of spontaneous acting which stands out in memory.

"I am St. Peter at the Golden Gate," I said. "Try to get past me." Some gave very good reasons why they ought to be allowed to enter. One girl came rushing from the Heaven side and implored me to let her out of the dull place. Then a boy of fourteen came along whistling, his hands in his pockets.

"Hi," I said, "you can't go in there."

He stopped and looked at me.

"You are a new man on the job, aren't you?"

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"You don't know who I am, do you?" he asked.

"And who exactly are you?" said I with a sneer.



"God," he said, and walked into Heaven.

In Summerhill School we have quite a lot of dramatic work. Every end-of-term performance consists of plays written in the school, mostly by the children. Sometimes I write a short comedy but we prefer to have children's plays. The cast produces the play, dresses it, provides the scenery and props without any assistance from the staff. I announce the play and it is alarming when I ask a dramatist of eight the title of his play and get the reply that it is called *The Bad Gangster* in ten acts. However, as the first act consists of two gangsters meeting on the stage with a "Hullo, Spike," and a "Hullo, Alf," (curtain) the ten-act play takes ten minutes.

The interesting thing is this, that many a child who cannot attempt spontaneous acting can act well in a part he has to learn. I am ready to believe that if I had the whole cast of any West End play present at my spontaneous class, half of them would shrink in fear from attempting to act situations that small children would romp through. More than once I have heard a professional actress say when watching our children: "I wouldn't have the pluck even to try."

Does a childhood talent for acting persist into adult life? Seldom. I have had girls who were wonderful; I was certain that one day they would be famous on the stage. After leaving school they never acted again. Only two old pupils, Virginia Pilkington (Hewett) and Peter Russell took up acting as a profession. How many children who can paint fine pictures at fourteen ever take up art as a profession?

Well, we carry on with our acting every Sunday night, and a happy audience watches happy players eat imaginary fruit, and seaisick honeymooners cross the Channel; they listen to dialogues between strangers, between foreigners and policemen, between women who gossip at the back door

with frying-pans in their hands. The scope is unlimited; it affords the widest subject on the curriculum. Any of the following could appear in a typical Sunday night programme at Summerhill: Pass a chained savage dog. (A girl of eleven went up to pat it with a "Hullo, old Buster.") A savage finds an alarm clock. Borrow a shilling diplomatically, and refuse the borrower tactfully. Everyone gets a prize at school except you. You open a door and find yourself on a platform; an audience cheers and demands a speech; you have no notion of what the meeting is about. Answer in person an advert. for an amanuensis, not knowing the meaning of the word. (Half the applicants think it means a manicurist.) Foose a golf shot when playing a foursome with three bishops. Approach a complete stranger and say solemnly: "I am mad." (Watch children making it comedy every time.) Sell quack medicines, dogs, watches, a wooden leg. Entertain country cousins in town.

I said earlier that children always avoid anything emotionally serious or solemn. There is one exception. "Spike has been in prison for years after being double-crossed by Scarface. He comes to kill his betrayer and it takes a little time before he realises that Scarface has gone blind." Children never try to make a rag out of that one. No child has ever killed the blind ruffian.

I end up with a situation that appeals to most young actors. The father of the family says: "You all know that Brown was hanged last week. Mrs. Brown is coming to tea to-day. For heaven's sake think twice before you speak to her." Of course the M. Hulot of the family meets the lady with a request to have a "drop" of something, and the young son asks the lady to admire his skill when he lassoes the bucking rocking-horse with his Christmas-stocking lariat. It is always clean fun; in my long experience of child actors I have never seen one use the cheap method of so many variety actors—the pornographic *double entente*.

# THEATRE BOOKSHELF

## Proteus in America

**Form and Idea in Modern Theatre**, by John Gassner. Dryden Press. New York. \$4.50.  
**The Dramatic Event**, by Eric Bentley. Dobson. 21s.

Gassner and Bentley are admired names in the otherwise chaotic literature of modern drama. We are indebted to both for massive volumes of selected American and European plays otherwise inaccessible in print or in English as the case may be, and both have produced scarcely less formidable volumes of theatrical theory and practical criticism. Their new books are welcome too, once the English reader has fought his way past the alarming abstract terminology of Gassner, the Yale professor, and the cheap cracks of Bentley, the drama journalist.

Bentley's new book is made up of notices of selected Broadway shows which he contributed to *The New Republic* in the years 1952-4 (when this book was published in America; as usual, we have to wait). They abound in this sort of thing: "On the first night of Mr. Van Druten's *Pee Got Sixpence* it was God who turned in His grave." "The Eliot of *The Cocktail Party* joins hands with the Huxley of *The Gioconda Smile* to relieve the rich of their sexual guilt by appealing to a Higher Reality." I am afraid Mr. Bentley thinks this sort of thing can't fail to get a big laugh from anybody who is not a Christian crusader or a Capitalist lackey. I doubt if I qualify on either count, but the effect is to make me want to rush out and embrace the first Bourgeois Value I meet.

Fortunately for both of us Bentley is really better than this. One of the dangers of journalism, he sees, is *classification*. "The New This and the New That are classes. The critic is all the time putting artists and works of art in categories. That is bad enough. The journalist critic goes one worse: rashly consigning his victims to this pigeonhole and that, he has to improvise even the pigeonholes." This does not stop him from defining, usefully it seems to me, the principal schools of current practice (in New York) as "the Kazanian-realistic and the Beatonian-gorgeous." We know just what he means.

Professor Gassner's is the sort of book that makes weak characters like myself decide, after one appalled glance at the contents list, to look at the pictures first. They are mostly very good pictures indeed, except that there could hardly be a less suitable one to represent the Elizabethan platform stage. On the other hand there could hardly be a better setting than that of *Summer and Smoke* (by, it almost goes without saying, Jo Mielziner) to illustrate Gassner's whole thesis.

The caption to this photo is, however, headed "Eclecticism—A Symbolic Theatricalisation of Realism" at which my nerve very nearly failed me altogether. Even when I did get my teeth into Gassner's important final chapter on "The Duality of Theatre" I still shied fiercely at the allegation, which for my part I indignantly deny, that "as spectators in the theatre, we make use of a built-in mechanism comparable to a shuttle, which enables us to move back and forth between the planes of reality and theatre." Shuttles to you, Mr. Gassner.

In plainer English, Gassner's thesis is that so far from realism and theatricality being a twain that shall never meet the one is constantly passing into the other. This dualism is in the actor, in the play, in the audience, all the time. The implication is that Mr. Bentley's Kazanian-realistic and Beatonian-gorgeous opposites may meet some time, or at any rate that they certainly should. I think you ought to read these opposite books. They go together too.

ROY WALKER

## Contemporary Theatre

**International Theatre Annual No. 1**. Ed. Harold Hobson. John Calder. 21s. **Contemporary Theatre 1953-1956**, by Audrey Williamson. Rockliff. 25s. **Theatre World Annual No. 7**, compiled by Frances Stephens. Rockliff. 21s.

"The theatre . . . has never been so international as it is to-day" writes Madame Edwige Feuillère in her Foreword to *International Theatre Annual*, and indeed the constant stream of foreign companies to London—and of British companies overseas—is a new and challenging post-war phenomenon. To London they came, companies from China and Japan, from Moscow, the two Germanys, Africa, Hungary and Spain, the famous French companies of Jean Vilar, of Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault, of Madame Feuillère herself, regaling us with a plethora of good things. There was need therefore for a book giving a discriminating, informed view of international theatre to-day and Mr. Hobson has gathered together a remarkable assemblage of talents for his new venture so that in a long and closely written volume there is not a dull page.

Wisely, he has not tried to cover everything everywhere. There is an overall picture of theatre in London and the Provinces and some of its 200 "Reps." (J. W. Lambert and J. C. Trewin), of theatre in Paris but omitting the Paris Festival (Jean-Pierre Lenoir), and a note on the Moscow Theatre and *Hamlet*, a full description of theatre in New York, Broadway and "Off-Broadway" (John Beau-

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CHATTO & WINDUS

fort and Alan Schneider), with Arthur Miller the playwright to correct the enthusiasm of his compatriots by telling us that theatre in New York "is the usual trendless jumble." An account is given of the remarkable rebirth of theatre in Canada, and there is a glorious travelogue from Dame Sybil Thorndike about touring in Australia and New Zealand, vivid, informative and colourful. From the Middle East comes a description by Charles Landstone of the Israeli theatre, professional and amateur, and of the semi-finals round of a Regional Festival, modelled on the British Drama League's, held late at night in a cinema standing amidst farm lands near Nazareth, at which three teams of agricultural workers competed, the standard "probably higher than that of comparable English companies," the audience seething with excitement in the intervals, and rapt with attention during the performances.

In the final section of the book, there is a brilliant article on "The Brecht Revolution" by Sam Wanamaker (who produced *The Threepenny Opera* in London) in which he tells us how he resisted Brecht and fought against his powerful and subversive theories, but was won, despite himself, at last, by the sheer genius of the man when he watched him at work on six plays in his own theatre in East Berlin. Now the Berliner Ensemble has been to London and which of us who saw it will ever forget *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*?

This last section on people and performances holds the cream of the book and is frankly personal and all the better for it. Mr. Hobson selects Samuel Beckett as the Dramatist of the Year and Madame Feuilleire as the Actress of the Year. He regards her performance in *La Dame aux Camélias* as one of the two most superb performances he has ever seen. The other was that of Sir Laurence Olivier as *Macbeth*. It is a further cause for congratulation that out of the 170 first nights that Monsieur Lenoir attended in Paris, two of the three he selects for special mention later came to London. These were Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault in *Le Chien du Jardinier*, and Maria Casares as the tortured queen in Hugo's *Marie Tudor*, given by Jean Vilar's Théâtre National Populaire at the Palace Theatre. These four productions, most varied in style, were truly in the first rank, and we were lucky to see them, as well as Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, in the course of one year.

Each book that Miss Williamson publishes enhances her reputation and *Contemporary Theatre 1953-1956* gives us the same alert mind and balanced judgment. It is rarely that she misses an important theatrical event, so it is sad to learn that she missed *Titus Andronicus* at Stratford-on-Avon, for I can imagine with what enthusiasm she would have responded to the great acting and imaginative staging of that monstrous, horrific play. Her reliability on matters theatrical makes me

regret more than ever having failed to see Orson Welles in *Moby Dick*, of which she gives a most spirited description. The book ends with a tribute to the English Stage Company and the good work it is doing at the Royal Court Theatre.

The "Theatre World" Annual provides a pictorial record of the London Theatre, set forth in orderly fashion with many photographs and cast lists and a few comments. It is a useful record which even includes a picture of *Fidelio* at the Royal Festival Hall produced by Wieland Wagner.

JANET LEEPER

## Four Monographs

**Margaret Rutherford**, by Eric Keown. Rockliff. 15s. **Paul Scofield**, by J. C. Trewin. Rockliff. 15s. **Emlyn Williams**, by Richard Findlater. Rockliff. 15s. **The Fabulous Orson Welles**, by Peter Noble. Hutchinson. 25s.

There have been three recent additions to the Rockliff Monographs by well-known critics on well-known players. It is a surprise to find Margaret Rutherford cropping up as number seven in the series before, say, Flora Robson or Donald Wolfit. The lady is endeared and revered, but not all Eric Keown's smooth, easy-to-read text can persuade me that such triumphs as Aunt Bijou (in *Spring Meeting*), Madame Arcati, Miss Prism and two eccentric Anouilh Duchesses, however enjoyable, serve to sustain a study as just as this. And as in the case of other players who started to find fame in a pre-war matinée-theatre very different from our own, some of the actual plays in which Miss Rutherford appeared are all too often just not worth recording.

My own feeling is that Miss Rutherford's essentially good-humoured comic gifts do not encompass the portrayal of either debauchery or aristocracy, and thus I estimate her Lady Wishfort much lower than does Mr. Keown: but then Dame Edith has annexed that play so thoroughly she could probably play Mirabell, Foible and Witwoud as well to perfection if she wished. Of Miss Rutherford's film career, Mr. Keown observes fairly and characteristically that "she has seldom been intelligently used by the film moguls, who seem to have her irrevocably fixed in their inflexible card-index as an eccentric parish worker."

Mr. Trewin's study of Paul Scofield is compact of his critical virtues—his enthusiasm, his feeling for (and ability to quote) poetry, his excellent memory for details of performances. He has seen and remembered almost all the important stages in Scofield's career, and conveys the excitement engendered by this actor, in his view the "heir-apparent" to Gielgud and Olivier.

Mr. Findlater's talent for vigorous controversy about theatre politics (on the dust-jacket he describes himself as in part "a propagandist") has no scope in a straight

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HACDONALD

study of Emlyn Williams, but he marshals the facts plainly and admirably, though I have no idea what he means by: "Plastically, Williams is inarticulate." On the other hand, I was delighted to find him rallying to that most underrated of Williams' plays, *Accolade*.

All three studies, in sum, are well done: whether they were worth doing I am uncertain. Unless the subject be of the very highest interest (and of the present trio only Scofield seems to me to meet this requirement) the critic has an uphill task sustaining interest when writing at this length. Moreover his brief apparently restricts him to critical assessment from the outside, depriving him (and us) of information about a player's personality, tastes and methods which would give a clearer notion of what makes him or her tick from the inside. Granted critics are seldom close personal friends with major actors, the fact remains that the path trodden here is narrow and restricted, and in addition, surprisingly, too many of the photographs in all three books are really not particularly striking or interesting.

In contrast, Peter Noble's biography of Orson Welles offers a wealth of gossip without the corrective of the critical temperament. Yet Mr. Noble has collected and collated all the printable facts about Welles, and the result is lively and extremely readable. His book is aptly named: Welles is indeed fabulous. Balzac would have written a novel about him.

PETER FORSTER

## Shakespeariana

**Shakespeare in His Age**, by F. E. Halliday. Duckworth. 30s. **Shakespeare—a Pictorial Biography**, by F. E. Halliday. Thames & Hudson. 25s. **The Structural Problem in Shakespeare's Henry the Fourth**, by Harold Jenkins. Methuen. 2s. 6d. **King Richard II**, Ed. Peter Ure. Methuen. 18s. **Shakespeare at the Old Vic**, by Roger Wood and Mary Clarke. Hamish Hamilton. 25s. **Shakespeare Memorial Theatre 1954-56**. Reinhardt. 21s.

The task Mr. Halliday sets himself is not an easy one. His aim in *Shakespeare in His Age* is to show us the background into which Shakespeare was born and to trace year by year the events that took place during his lifetime. The result is a fascinating account of a fascinating age. The pages of this book are packed with useful information. The familiar great events—the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, the Armada, the Essex rising; the small domestic things—marriages, lawsuits, pamphlets, all find their place in this detailed tapestry. We are reminded, too, of the cultural forces—the dramatists whose works Shakespeare must have seen, the music he must have listened to, the painters he may have admired.

"No man is a pecc of the Continent; a part of the maine." The author quotes John Donne's words at the beginning of his book. "But," one asks oneself, "What Continent and what maine?" Mr. Halliday's attempt to put

# Shakespeare at the Old Vic 1955-6

ROGER WOOD and MARY CLARKE

The third of the lavishly illustrated records of the Old Vic's Five Year Plan, with photographs by Roger Wood and text by Mary Clarke. Among the fine performances recorded here are *Julius Caesar*, with Paul Rogers as Brutus and John Neville as Mark Antony; *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with Wendy Hiller and Margaret Rawlings as the wives and Paul Rogers as Falstaff; *The Winter's Tale*; Richard Burton in *Henry V* and, alternating the title role and that of Iago with John Neville, *Othello*, and Tyrone Guthrie's riotously original production, in the Edwardian romantic style, of *Troilus and Cressida*, with John Neville and Rosemary Harris in the title parts, Wendy Hiller as Helen of Troy (playing Schubert's *Marche Militaire* on the piano) and Paul Rogers, complete with grey top hat and binoculars, a most memorable Pandarus.

25s.

HAMISH HAMILTON

Shakespeare in his age is absorbing, but somehow that enigmatic figure eludes his grasp. He does not seem to belong there. Was he, after all, such a true Elizabethan? Passages from his plays crowd into the mind which seem to deny this. Genius looks both backward and forward; it cannot be pinned down. It belongs not to the age into which it was born but to all ages.

In Mr. Halliday's preface to his second book he says that his object has been "quite simply to describe what we know of Shakespeare's life after three centuries of discovery and to illuminate and animate the story by illustration." There are a great number of these illustrations ranging from photographs of Stratford and the surrounding countryside (specially taken by Edwin Smith) to facsimile reproductions of Elizabethan and Jacobean records. There is, of necessity, a certain amount of conjecture, but the book is convincing and highly readable. Certain persistent misconceptions are dispelled, one being that Shakespeare was an inspired peasant; another that he didn't write the plays.

*The Structural Problem in Shakespeare's Henry the Fourth* is the Text of an inaugural lecture given at Westfield College, London, in 1955. It offers a new and convincing solution to the problem of whether Shakespeare planned the two parts of *Henry IV* as one long drama, or whether Part II was an unpremeditated sequel. Professor Jenkins wisely uses the term "planned" with qualifications. He analyses plot structure and dramatic shape and from his analysis concludes that Shakespeare whilst writing changed his mind. "*Henry IV*, then," says Professor Jenkins, "is both one play and two. Part I begins with an action which it finds it has not scope for but which Part II rounds off. But with one half of the action already concluded in Part I, there is danger of a gap in Part II. To stop the gap Part II expands the unfinished story of Falstaff and reduplicates what is already finished in the story of the Prince. The two parts are complementary, they are also independent and even incompatible." This essay has the ring of truth and is recommended to all who are interested in how Shakespeare wrote.

*King Richard II* in the Arden Shakespeare series, is a completely new edition. There is a very full introduction with interesting notes on the curious Garden Scene and an excellent chapter on Richard's character in relation to the play as a whole. This section will be of value to actors and producers, for *Richard II* has sometimes been lamentably twisted in performance. It is pointed out that the interest of the play, as indicated by its structure, must lie in the portrayal of Richard's suffering, and we are warned against the dangers of dwelling too much on the theory that Richard is both a "poet" and an "actor". Richard is a poet largely because he is a character in a poetic play and did not, Mr. Ure points out,

lose his kingdom "through a preference for blank verse over battles."

The two picture books are sumptuously produced. *Shakespeare at the Old Vic* has a wealth of action photographs—over 150 of them; the proceeds from its sale will go to the Old Vic Building Fund. *Shakespeare Memorial Theatre 1954-56* contains a critical analysis by Ivor Brown and photographs by Angus McBean. For students of the theatre it seems a pity that there are not more straight, well lighted photographs of the settings undecorated by the cast. It is sometimes difficult to see where and how the action could take place.

DONALD FITZJOHN

## The Student-Producer

*Approach to the Theatre*, by Frances Mackenzie. French. 5s.

I must confess that I started to read this book without any particular relish. Because Frances Mackenzie had written it, I knew it would be sensible, practical and helpful, but I have read and reviewed so many books of advice for amateur producers that I hardly expected this one could have anything particularly new or stimulating to say. The fact that it describes itself as intended "for Student-Producers" and has the sternly utilitarian look of a school text-book did nothing to raise my hopes. But I soon discovered that this is a far more important and original book than its unassuming title, its rather humble appearance and its very modest price would suggest.

What Miss Mackenzie has set out to do is to define that mysterious quality called "a sense of the theatre" without which no play or production can ever be more than just competent. It is something which is instantly recognisable in the work of any playwright or producer, however inexperienced, but it has always been regarded as a rare instinct which is a gift from the gods, something which cannot be defined, taught and developed. Miss Mackenzie, however, believes that even an inexperienced producer can, by reason as well as by instinct, develop his own theatre sense if he understands some of the elements which make a play live upon the stage. Conflict, suspense, contrast, dramatic irony, dramatic shape—these are the elements which Miss Mackenzie analyses in the first part of her book. But she does so not as a theorist but as an extremely experienced practitioner in the theatre. Her experience has taught her that a producer who has an intellectual appreciation of a play does not necessarily achieve a lively production. She warns that "too much academic discussion tends to make the student-producer lose sight of his theatrical values." So having defined and analysed the elements of "a sense of the theatre" she devotes the rest of her book to showing how they can be best developed during rehearsal, how both the producer and the actors can stimulate their imagination, develop their powers of con-



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centration, and enrich their sense of characterisation by a keener observation of everyday life. The great value of this book is that while it sets forth all the basic rules of production, it also shows how to use them imaginatively and excitingly.

NORMAN MARSHALL

## Planning and Doing

**Amateur Drama on a Small Income**, by Heather Conway. Hutchinson. 2s. 6d. **Stage Make-up**, by Richard Courtenay. Union Publishing Company, Huddersfield. **Magic of Make-up**, by Harald Melvill. Rockliff. 15s. **Lighting the Amateur Stage**, by M. G. Say. Albion Press. 5s. **The Technique of Acting**, by F. Cowles Strickland. McGraw-Hill. New York. 34s.

I must begin by drawing attention to Heather Conway's little book which is a masterpiece of concise and precise compression. Frances Mackenzie, her colleague in the Training Department of the British Drama League, refers to the book in her Preface as "an encyclopaedia of practical and artistic advice." It is nothing less. I could find no aspect of putting on a play which Miss Conway has not discussed in a helpful, sensible, and often stimulating fashion. Adequately printed with plenty of line drawings and photographs it has been published at a price that should ensure its sale in tens of thousands.

*Stage Make-up* has been issued free as a part of the service of the Four Valleys Area Youth Drama Committee of the West Riding of Yorkshire (Send 6d. stamp to the Education Office, 35 Kirkgate, Huddersfield.) This is also a straightforward and practical little book.

Harald Melvill's book is more of a standard work. It is very well printed, fully illustrated, and bound to be handled. The text, as one would expect from so practical an expert, is exemplary and fully lives up to its sub-title "An Illustrated Guide to Modern Methods."

*Lighting the Amateur Stage*, though obviously written by an engineer of experience, is spoilt by such splendours of jargon as "illumination is inversely proportional to the square of the distance" and of piffle such as a chapter headed "Living Light Should Kiss It." Anyone prepared to hack away the undergrowth will probably find some buried sense.

*The Technique of Acting* is tremendously thorough and a thorough bore. The problem of the actor, I would suggest, is to find a way of cultivating that winged ecstasy of spirit that will make this cumbersome old body of ours a thing of flame and freedom. I cannot see actors getting much help from a book that is written throughout in this sort of style: "Thus far the discussion of the relative effectiveness of various techniques has concerned itself largely with the vocal techniques and the use of movement because these are the techniques which are most frequently left to the discretion of the actor, while other techniques . . ." and so on for quite a serpentinian distance further. And the many exercises the



author proposes seem to me a sure way to kill the thing that, I presume, he loves. In any case the author cannot assume, as he does, that the actor has already acquired complete mastery of his voice and body. For after a few basic principles have been mastered, an actor has to find how to breathe and move each new character he undertakes as a part of the technique of entering, pointing, timing, upon which the author lays such a dead weight of insistence. Miss Conway's book made me itch to be doing: this one to reach for the nearest green-backed Penguin.

JOHN ALLEN

### Passiontide and Nativity Plays

**The Mystery of the Finding of the Cross,** by Henri Ghéon. Trans. Frank de Jonge. Large cast, chorus, choir. Dacre Press. 10s. 6d.

*The Way of the Cross* has become a Passiontide classic; we are now privileged to have an English version of the whole of the great drama of which it is only a part. The Benedictine monks of Amay had taken into their care at Tancrémont a great crucifix of the twelfth century, and in 1932 asked Henri Ghéon to write a mystery to celebrate the centenary of its traditional discovery in a field. Ghéon chose as his theme the Cross, linking Adam with Christ, taking the conversion of Constantine as a milestone in history, with the traditional discovery of the True Cross by St. Helena as the culmination. The play was first performed at Tancrémont in an open-air theatre seating 5,000. The stage (a plan is given) combined three scenes of action, Rome, Byzantium and Jerusalem; different levels were connected by stairways. A Greek Chorus and Coryphaeus emphasises powerfully the symbolism of the Cross and its bearing on humanity. When alternating with music set for a brass band the impact must indeed have been thrilling.

Acts I and II are historical. Constantine, returning from the victory of the Milvian Bridge in 313, won through the power of the Cross, proclaims his conviction that "Christ is God." His triumph is followed by the murder of his son and wife. Act III is based on the legend of the Finding of the True Cross. The Empress Helena, blaming herself to some extent for these horrors, turns to prayer and penance and starts on her weary journey to Jerusalem to search for the Cross. "When we have lived again in sorrow and in love, all the sorrowful, all the loving passion of Jesus Christ our Lord, then we will seek his Cross. It cannot be that he will deny it us if we dig deep enough in our own selves to plant it there." It is as she treads the Via Dolorosa that a chorus of Pilgrims appears following the Stations of the Cross with words familiar to many. At Calvary the sacred spot is revealed, the three crosses are recovered and a miracle makes plain which is the Cross of Christ. At the original performance the cross

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was carried in procession to the chapel where a relic of the True Cross was venerated.

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This Mystery was written in the fifteenth century, the age of Faith, when the teaching of the Church was at the core of everyday life, and when Biblical characters were well-known friends. Therefore it can be acted in the twentieth century with freshness and conviction, for it treats of everlasting truths and people of flesh and blood. Mr. Kirkup advocates the utmost simplicity in setting and production and gives practical advice on staging. The words of carols and hymns are included and there is a note on the music to be employed. Either "a restrained form of modern dress" or medieval costume could be worn. This delightful play should be considered by those who are planning a church production for next Christmas.

**Crown of Glory**, by Vera G. Cumberlege. 15m. Iw. crowd, choir. O.U.P. 2s. 6d.

This play, written for performance in a small Church, is intended to be an allegory of Christ's Passion, and tells the story of a young Christian in Roman Britain who through loyalty to his Lord is betrayed, brought to judgment and killed. It is written with sincerity but the situations are too obviously contrived to carry conviction and the glorious theme of martyrdom deserves a less pedestrian treatment.

KATHILEEN BAINBRIDGE-BELL

## Long Plays

**Meeting at Night**, by James Bridie. Constant. 8s. 6d.

Not the least interesting feature of this book is a long introduction by J. B. Priestley in which he pays tribute to his friend Bridie and makes an admirable evaluation of his work. He pictures "the middle-aged doctor sitting up at night to write his plays" as a man "essentially modest, serious, deeply and selflessly devoted to everything good and true in the theatre." When an artist succeeds early in his career in producing works of outstanding merit, he creates a standard by which his later work is sure to be judged. Bridie will be remembered for *A Sleeping Clergyman*, *The Anatomist* and *Tobias and the Angel*, his loveliest play. He was a prolific writer and nobody, as Priestley observes, would ever pretend that *Meeting at Night* was one of his major works. It is a straightforward light comedy; the story of an educated man incapable of living honestly, a plausible and agreeable master in assorted knavery. His present racket is "absent psychological treatment for rheumatism" which brings him a handsome income from hundreds of dupes. It has also brought him three letters of thanks from absent patients, one of whom happens to be

the wife of the Assistant Commissioner of Police. She says he may use her testimonial in any way he deems fit. Needless to say, he does. When, in Act III, the law is hard on his heels he produces his trump card and escapes a third term of imprisonment. This is an entertaining piece with many Bridie touches. (4 m., 2 w., 2 sets.)

**The Lizard on the Rock**, by John Hall. Methuen. 10s. 6d.

Few playwrights have so auspicious a send-off for a first play as Mr. Hall. Christopher Fry in an introduction expresses a desire to see *The Lizard on the Rock* in performance. Sir John Gielgud finds in it "a great deal of power and originality;" E. Martin Browne says "here is an author of outstanding promise." It is certainly a play which merits the attention; whether anything is gained dramatically by giving some of the speeches in verse-form is debatable, but Mr. Hall is a poet with a poet's feeling for words, and, whether he uses prose or verse-form, there is no questioning the excellence of the language. He is a vigorous writer and the play is swift moving with plenty of action. The central figure, a big Australian landowner, is a man of tremendous drive whose life has been one of unflinching success. He is ruthless, sparing neither himself nor others in the fulfilment of his projects. He has, however, always had the wise guidance of his overseer, an expert geologist, which his self-obsession has prevented him from recognizing. At a vital point in the development of an irrigation scheme upon which all his plans depend, his friend and counsellor dies and he must act alone if he is to prove his greatness. The play ends with his realisation that life must be measured in terms other than material success or failure. (7 m., 2 w., 2 sets.)

**Twilight of a Warrior**, by Walter Macken. Macmillan. 8s. 6d.

At a time when megalomania seems more than usually rife, it is perhaps not surprising to find under review two plays having this malady as a theme. In this play the "warrior" has been a commander in the I.R.A., worshipped for his gallantry, his name a household word. As a civilian in the new Ireland he has been successful in marrying into a flourishing business. But this does not suffice; he must have victories to minister to his ego; he must rule even though it means the humiliation and persecution of those around him. Although this is a story of frustration, it is by no means lacking in humour. The characters are nicely varied, interesting and convincing. Walter Macken has given us a well-constructed play, exciting and moving. (6 m., 3 w., 1 set.)

A. H. WHARRIER

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CATHERINE PRYNNE

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# NOTES AND NEWS

## Festival 1957

Entries for the 25th National Festival of Community Drama continue to come in despite the deterrent of petrol rationing, which has hit some rural districts severely.

The return of Gloucestershire, Southampton and Woodbridge into Stage One is welcomed: new festivals are being established at Brighton, Manchester, Long Melford and Shrewsbury, and plans are now well in hand for Stage Two, at which the new Nescafé Awards will be presented this year.

Area Finals have been booked at the Coliseum Theatre, Aberdare (Wales) and the David Lewis Theatre, Liverpool (North) on May 11th; at the Scala Theatre, London (East) on May 20th and the Jephson Gardens Pavilion, Leamington Spa (West) on May 25th. The English and National Finals will also be held in the Scala Theatre, London, on Saturday, 22nd June.

Full details of all these events may be obtained from the Festival Secretary, B.D.L., 9 Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.

## Theatre in the Hills

In the Seventh Annual Festival at Pitlochry, which lasts from April 20th to October 5th, the longest season yet planned, Jordan Lawrence will direct six plays of widely varying appeal. James Bridie's *The Last Trump*, set in the Highlands, is particularly appropriate to Pitlochry; two Irish plays are Micheal Mac Liammoir's comedy *Where Stars Walk*, and Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1957 marks the 50th anniversary of the first performance of the latter). From England come R. F. Delderfield's historical reconstruction, *The Mayerling Affair*, Priestley's recent comedy, *Mr. Kettle and Mrs. Moon* and Ben Travers' popular farce, *Rookery Nook*. All six plays will be in the repertory by May 18th and can be seen in one week.

## Theatre Research

The first General Assembly for delegates of all interested countries will be held by the International Federation for Theatre Research at Venice on July 22nd. This will be followed by a World Conference on Theatre Research, at which national methods of theatrical research will be compared; the influence and survival of the *Commedia dell'Arte* discussed; and the functions of music and dance in the contemporary theatre studied from the points of view of the author, the composer and producer. The first number of the proposed journal of the Federation, *Theatre Research-Recherches Théâtrales*, will be published to coincide with the Conference.

## Drama At Oxford

The Playhouse season continues to offer much that is of interest. The reviewers were respectful to the Cocteau *Knights of the Round Table*, which I myself thought one of the feeblest jokes ever concocted—and the cast appeared to agree with me. But the plays by Elias Canetti and Nicholas Moore, both of which were performed for the first time, were well worth putting on. The Canetti has a splendid idea, somewhat marred in the exposition: it would have been helped by a speedier production. Nicholas Moore's *Lock and Key*, a study in neurosis with only three main characters, kept our interest in spite of its restricted scope. The author still had secrets to impart in the last act, and the enigma of his hero's character remained in our minds to be thought of after the play was over. One of the characters however—that of a tart—was pure caricature, and I was left in doubt as to whether anything could have been made of her by an actress of greater range. The other two parts were excellently played by Sebastian Shaw (visiting the company) and Charmian Eyre, who never goes wrong in any of the varied roles she is given. There has also been some excellent and varied acting by Frederick Bartman during the season.

An interesting University production was that of Middleton's *The Changeling*, by the Experimental Theatre Club. Although the play has been well known to students of "Eng-Lit." since T. S. Eliot's essay on Middleton, I can find no record of any production in modern times, and I waited with excitement to see the famous scenes on the stage. The play itself did not disappoint, but the two characters on whom its success depends, were miscast. Eliot says: "Beatrice is not a moral creature; she becomes moral only by being damned." But this Beatrice (Peggy Woodford) was not so much amoral as childish, and her kittenishness gave no chance for the tragedy to develop.

The de Flores, too (Charles Lewson), was working against the grain, although he made a gallant attempt at an extremely difficult part: he seemed amiably grotesque rather than horrifying. "Gallant" is always a cruel word to use, but it seems to fit the attempt to make something of the impossible sub-plot, by playing it as an anti-masque to the tragedy. However, as the few lines that link it to the main plot were cut, we were left more than ever in the dark about its relevance to the play.

The liveliness and enthusiasm of both cast and audience made the evening enjoyable, and the hall (where late the government dispensed orange juice) had been transformed by a skilful setting.

ANNE RIDLER



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## Icelandic Play

The Imperial College Dramatic Society and the Comus Players opened the finely equipped new hall of the Imperial College Union with *Lofstur*, a play by the well-known Icelandic dramatist, Johann Sigurjonsson, translated by Jean Young and Eleanor Arkwright.

The play is based on an Icelandic folk-tale and its setting is the precincts of Holar Cathedral in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The action is interpreted in the light of Nietzsche's philosophy of the "superman" with his contempt for Christianity and its compassion for the weak. The hero's father, who is the Bishop's Steward, implants in his son the idea that power must be his sole aim, and Lofstur, desiring to delve further into the secret of life, surrenders himself to the forces of evil, willing the death of the low born girl he has seduced in order that he may marry the Bishop's daughter. Such is the outline of the plot, but this can give no idea of the horrifying atmosphere which the dramatist creates. The tragic and beautiful scene in Act Two between Lofstur and Steinunn was particularly well acted, and was, rightly, the highlight of the play. The Bishop's daughter was an attractive figure of light in contrast to the prevailing darkness. The production, though smooth, did not allow for much scope in the way of characterisation. The opening was regrettably slow, and it was only with Lofstur's entrance that the play came to life.

The excellent settings suggested the Icelandic scene most effectively, and the National dresses in the first act provided a note of authenticity. The lighting was imaginatively devised, its only fault being over-enthusiasm on the part of the electricians, who, on the night I saw the play, seemed too eager to demonstrate the excellence of their equipment.

HILARY GARDNER

## Bristol University D.S.

In the late Autumn of last year Ugo Betti's *Investigation* was given its English *première* by the University of Bristol Dramatic Society.

Mr. Priestley has been there before with *An Inspector Calls*, but the human relationships revealed are much more reminiscent of *Dangerous Corner*. This Italian family take the corner at suicidal speed. Iole, the younger sister, sums up the atmosphere: "It is only in families that the least decent and the most ridiculous things happen." The play concentrates on the least decent.

J. W. James and J. P. Scott have given us a translation which, in spite of "minor omissions by order of the Lord Chamberlain" carries a clarity and economy of expression well tuned to the brutal frankness of the play. Andrea, a successful lawyer, now devitalised by exile and tired of his wife to the point of nausea, has boarded a streetcar named desire

with Iole. The Inspector's probing reveals Andrea's consciousness of moral and spiritual failure, but he blames anybody but himself. This part was played with conviction and skill but the half-crazed, hysterical wife was the most surely conceived and brilliantly executed performance of the evening. Disgusted with her husband, she is yet jealous and possessive. The keystone of this crumbling family arch is Madame Egle who holds the purse-strings, exaggerates her frailty and tyrannizes over the entire household. She hates them as much as they hate her. The old woman dies alone, off-stage, and her "spirit" wanders through the room. She has loved no one but Iole, who despises her, but all her life has ached for love, as everyone must, "for a small coal of fire in the heart." Is this Betti's message?

When the hate and futility are over, Andrea begs the Inspector to help him. In a burst of anger the Inspector tells him to clear up the mess for himself. His life is his own responsibility. We leave the family where we found them, wandering off to an American film called *Action*, a final ironic comment on people corroded by boredom and greed.

John Parry's production was forthright, with clear pointing of tension and climax. Less competently produced, or acted with less sincerity and conviction, the play would have been tedious. But we were shown clearly the playwright's intention: "a cry of man's horror at the evil which is in man." The University of Bristol Dramatic Society fully justified its courage and initiative in presenting the play. But perhaps, after all, there is something to be said for the Grove Family.

NORA RATCLIFF

## Arena Theatre

With a comedy set on a wharf at Rotherhithe, Studio Theatre Club, which sometimes essays the heights of drama, might be said to have come down to sea level. In *Paradise Street* by Antony Brown, produced on January 20th at the Mahatma Gandhi Hall, the river and shipping never seemed far away and the dockside atmosphere was convincingly created. This is a comedy in traditional style, the story of a selfish father trying in moments snatched from a busy night's smuggling to thwart his daughter's marriage. The characters are firmly drawn and lively; a twisting plot turns up amusing situations that may become farcical at times but are balanced by an undercurrent of poetry, the unconscious poetry of people who would be horrified at any such idea.

Clive Goodwin's production overcame the chief disadvantage of arena theatre in an unadapted hall—bad visibility. The stage was mercifully uncluttered and the furniture low enough to allow a clear view. The feeling of intimacy which is the particular virtue of this form was experienced throughout and

most of the company seemed to have found the right style of acting for an audience only a few feet away, though there was a tendency to over-project. As the father, Ray Adamson gave a rounded, human study, with plenty of comedy but never slipping into caricature. Peter La Trobe, as an old down-and-out revivalist, a part which might well have tempted overplaying, was genuinely funny and touching; good too were George Tovey as a lorry driver with faith in astrology, and Timothy Harley as a young apprentice.

CATHERINE PRYNNE

## Hamlet at Kilburn

Although a production of *Hamlet* must ultimately stand or fall by the acting of the name part, this is not the only difficulty and the play is a tough proposition for a school performance. In choosing it for their forty-seventh Shakespearean production last December, Kilburn Grammar School were no doubt influenced by having in G. S. Bell a boy capable of making a fine attempt at Hamlet. Excellently suited to the part in appearance, he gave a sincere, straightforward rendering, wisely playing each scene for its own value and letting the apparent contradictions of the character take care of themselves. He managed also to give full value to the verse, particularly in the soliloquies, without suggesting a recitation.

In a school it is clearly desirable to include as many boys as possible and most of the parts were shared between two actors, which may have meant giving a chance to some of the less gifted or less experienced. Notable performances came from Ophelia whose mad scene with its simple self-absorption was extremely moving, and the First Grave-digger, with a ripe, well-observed characterisation, which might have come straight from behind a barrow in the neighbouring High Road. Admirably clear speaking was a feature of the production, but there was a tendency for gestures to appear drilled rather than to spring from the actor's conviction, and the crowd often seemed to lack that vital belief in itself which turns schoolboys in fancy dress into "lords, ladies, players, etc."

M.C.L.

## American Speech Records

Miss Ruth Draper, who died recently, recorded five of her inimitable sketches especially for the British Drama League on two 12-inch records. Lincoln's Speech at Gettysburg has also been recorded by Mr. Arthur Klein in the authentic dialect. Price 9s. 6d. each. Postage: 1 to 3 records, 2s. Complete set post free. Explanatory booklet 1s. B.D.L., 9 Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.

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# TAX AND EDUCATIONAL DRAMA

SUPPORTERS of the living theatre, which has already felt the effect of the Entertainments Tax, may well regret the Chancery Court's recent decision that the venture launched by Mr. John Clements, in conjunction with the Arts Council, to foster dramatic art is not exempt from income tax: "Associated Artists Ltd. v. Inland Revenue Commissioners."

It will be recalled that Associated Artists Ltd. originated in 1946 in an idea of Mr. Clements', the aim being "to spread the knowledge and appreciation of all that is best in the theatre," and educate the public in a taste for better class plays. It also afforded talented young actors an opportunity to appear in such plays which might not, otherwise, have been available to them. As a non-profit-making association with such objects the company claimed exemption from Income Tax. Its Memorandum of Association declared it to be established "To present classical, artistic, cultural and educational dramatic works . . . To foster, promote and increase the interest of the public in the dramatic art" generally by plays, lectures, competitions and instruction, and stated that its income and property should be used solely for these objects and nothing should be paid to members as profits.

The court was informed that the company began in association with the Arts Council which provided an interest-free loan of £1,500. Similar loans to the extent of £7,500 were also provided; £1,500 by Mr. Clements himself, and £6,000 by two commercial theatrical enterprises. The company produced a series of plays: *The Kingmaker*, *Marriage à la Mode*, *The Beaux Stratagem*, in which Miss Kay Hammond was the leading lady, *Man and Superman* including the *Don Juan in Hell* scene, and *Pygmalion*. *The Beaux Stratagem*, after a difficult start in the provinces, was a marked success and made a profit of £26,000. The other plays, however, while artistically successful, did not prove profitable. In order to assist the company, the Arts Council made a further interest-free loan of £2,000 and Mr. Clements, who both acted in and produced the plays, waived his fees and salary on several occasions. In 1951, the association with the Arts Council ceased but, in view of the company's assurance that it would not lower the standard of the plays produced, the Council agreed that the company should keep its funds. No plays had been produced for some time but the company had now acquired a new play, *The Wit to Woo*.

His Lordship began by saying that there was no question that, in fact, all these productions, which he did not propose to describe in detail, had a charitable object. But that was not the

point. The only question was whether the company was incorporated for the purpose of carrying out exclusively charitable objects and that depended on the proper interpretation of the company's Memorandum of Association. After referring, in detail, to the objects as set out in the Memorandum, his Lordship mentioned that the company was incorporated by Mr. Clements to promote them. This matter, continued his Lordship, came before him on appeal from the Special Commissioners of Income Tax who had found the company liable. Both Mr. Clements and Sir Kenneth Barnes, who for 46 years was principal of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, gave evidence before the Special Commissioners. Sir Kenneth's view was that, undoubtedly, the productions in which the company had engaged had done much to advance the theatre and dramatic taste. But Counsel for the Crown had directed his main attack upon the word "artistic" in the phrase "To present classical, artistic, cultural and educational dramatic works . . ." The first question to consider was whether these words were to be read conjunctively, so that the dramatic works must all be classical and artistic and cultural and educational, or disjunctively. Continuing, his Lordship remarked that it was a pure question of construction. It was not unimportant that commas appeared after the words "classical, artistic," and in Clause (f) of the Memorandum, in repeating these same words the disjunctive "or" appeared. Moreover the specified object was not to promote some charitable purpose but to produce plays. Would it be *ultra vires* if the company produced a play that was classical and artistic but not cultural and educational? What was meant in this context by "artistic"? It had been said that "in the case of artistic taste, one of the best ways of training it is by presenting works of high class, and gradually training people to like them in preference to works of an inferior class." The object here, as set out in the Memorandum was not to produce artistic taste but to produce artistic plays. His Lordship found it difficult to attach any real charitable concept to an artistic dramatic work. It was too wide and too vague and, therefore, not charitable. His Lordship also considered that a further clause empowering the company to do anything incidental or, in its opinion, conducive to the attainment of its objects was sufficient to render the company non-charitable, as what the company might think conducive might not necessarily be so. Attacks on other portions of the Memorandum were rejected, but it was held that the company was not established solely for charitable purposes and, therefore, not exempt from Income Tax.

In order to view this preoccupation with words and commas in the right perspective it must be remembered that what a company seeks to do and is empowered to do can only be discovered by seeing what its Memorandum says, and it is not difficult, for instance, to call to mind many plays which have been exceedingly artistic but far from educational, at least in the sense in which the word is used in connection with charitable objects.

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